

# Banksy

Handout to the presentation on the 31.08.09 about the Graffiti Artist Banksy  
in the seminar Performing Culture



Daniel McKinnon  
Michael Winkelmann



I'm going to speak my mind, so this won't take very long.

Graffiti is not the lowest form of art. Despite having to creep about at night and lie to your mum it's actually the most honest artform available. There is no elitism or hype, it exhibits on some of the best walls a town has to offer, and nobody is put off by the price of admission.

A wall has always been the best place to publish your work.

The people who run our cities don't understand graffiti because they think nothing has the right to exist unless it makes a profit. But if you just value money then your opinion is worthless.

They say graffiti frightens people and is symbolic of the decline in society, but graffiti is only dangerous in the mind of three types of people; politicians, advertising executives and graffiti writers.

The people who truly deface our neighbourhoods are the companies that scrawl their giant slogans across buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff. They expect to be able to shout their message in your face from every available surface but you're never allowed to answer back. Well, they started this fight and the wall is the weapon of choice to hit them back.

Some people become cops because they want to make the world a better place. Some people become vandals because they want to make the world a better looking place.

Speak softly, but carry a big can of paint. Mona Lisa with rocket launcher. 15 minutes, Soho 2001. Later converted to Osama Bin Laden by an unknown artist. Then removed after two days.





## Broken Window Theory

Criminologists James Q Wilson and George Kelling developed a theory of criminal behaviour in the 1980's that became known as the 'Broken Window Theory'. They argued crime was the inevitable result of disorder and that if a window in a building is smashed but not repaired people walking by will think no-one cares. Then more windows will be broken, graffiti will appear and rubbish get dumped. The likelihood of serious crime being committed then increases dramatically as neglect becomes visible. The researchers believed there was a direct link between vandalism, street violence and the general decline of society. This theory was the basis of the infamous New York City crime purge of the early nineties and the zero-tolerance attitude to graffiti.

### Letter received to Banksy website

*I dont know who you are or how many of you there are but i am writing to ask you to stop painting your things where we live. In particular xxxxxx road in Hackney. My brother and me were born here and have lived here all our lives but these days so many yuppies and students are moving here neither of us can afford to buy a house where we grew up anymore. Your graffities are undoubtably part of what makes these wankers think our area is cool. You're obviously not from round here and after youve driven up the house prices youll probably just move on. Do us all a favour and go do your stuff somewhere else like Brixton.*

*daniel (name and address not withheld)*

The identity of Graffiti Writer Banksy has been unknown for several years, until the Yellow Press published pictures showing him during work preparation in Jamaica in 2005. The story had never a serious follow up. I think the idea/brand/message works better for the people when they don't know who he is. They don't want to know. Michael Winkelmann



Nobody ever listened to me until they didn't know who I was.

When I was eighteen I spent one night trying to paint 'LATE AGAIN' in big silver bubble letters on the side of a passenger train. British transport police showed up and I got ripped to shreds running away through a thorny bush. The rest of my mates made it to the car and disappeared so I spent over an hour hidden under a dumper truck with engine oil leaking all over me. As I lay there listening to the cops on the tracks I realised I had to cut my painting time in half or give up altogether. I was staring straight up at the stencilled plate on the bottom of a fuel tank when I realised I could just copy that style and make each letter three feet high.

I got home at last and crawled into bed next to my girlfriend. I told her I'd had an epiphany that night and she told me to stop taking that drug cos it's bad for your heart.



Banksy was born 1974 in Bristol. He started his underground career in the late 1980s and sprayed places all over the world. His artworks are often satirical pieces of art on topics such as politics, culture, and ethics. His street art, which combines graffiti writing with a distinctive stencilling technique became very popular among his fans and in the graffiti scene. He claims to have come up with the idea when he had to hide from the police who nearly caught him tagging trains. Banksy's stencils feature striking and humorous images occasionally combined with slogans. The message is usually anti-war, anti-capitalist or antiestablishment.

Subjects include rats, monkeys, policemen, soldiers, children and the elderly.

Banksy's popularity grows constantly. Celebrities like Christina Aguilera, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie have bought pieces for between 20,000 and 200,000 US-Dollars.



The debate if he is an artist or a criminal is also ongoing. City officials often let his pictures over paint.

But until now, he has never charged for vandalism. It seems that it is still to unpopular in the public eye to put him in a courtroom.

He started to paint walls in English cities but moved on to sneak his own artwork in different museums all over the world, comments on the wall which divides Palatinate and Israel with his graffiti, works on sculptures and got recently into animatronics (little robots who repeat simple actions). In June 2009 the Bristol museum gave Banksy his first official exhibition.

Old man      *You paint the wall, you make it look beautiful*

Me      *Thanks*

Old man      *We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall, go home*

## Advice on making stencils

- Mindless vandalism can take a bit of thought.
- Nothing in the world is more common than unsuccessful people with talent, leave the house before you find something worth staying in for.
- Think from outside the box, collapse the box and take a fucking sharp knife to it.
- A regular 400ml can of paint will give you up to 50 A4 sized stencils. This means you can become incredibly famous/unpopular in a small town virtually overnight for approximately ten pounds.
- Try to avoid painting in places where they still point at aeroplanes.
- Spray the paint sparingly onto the stencil from a distance of 8 inches.
- When explaining yourself to the Police its worth being as reasonable as possible. Graffiti writers are not real villains. I'm always reminded of this by real villains who consider the idea of breaking in someplace, not stealing anything and then leaving behind a painting of your name in four foot high letters the most retarded thing they ever heard of.
- Be aware that going on a major mission totally drunk out of your head will result in some truly spectacular artwork and at least one night in the cells.
- The easiest way to become invisible is to wear a day-glo vest and carry a tiny transistor radio playing Heart FM very loudly. If questioned about the legitimacy of your painting simply complain about the hourly rate.
- Crime against property is not real crime. People look at an oil painting and admire the use of brushstrokes to convey meaning. People look at a graffiti painting and admire the use of a drainpipe to gain access.
- The time of getting fame for your name on its own is over. Artwork that is only about wanting to be famous will never make you famous. Fame is a by-product of doing something else. You don't go to a restaurant and order a meal because you want to have a shit.

